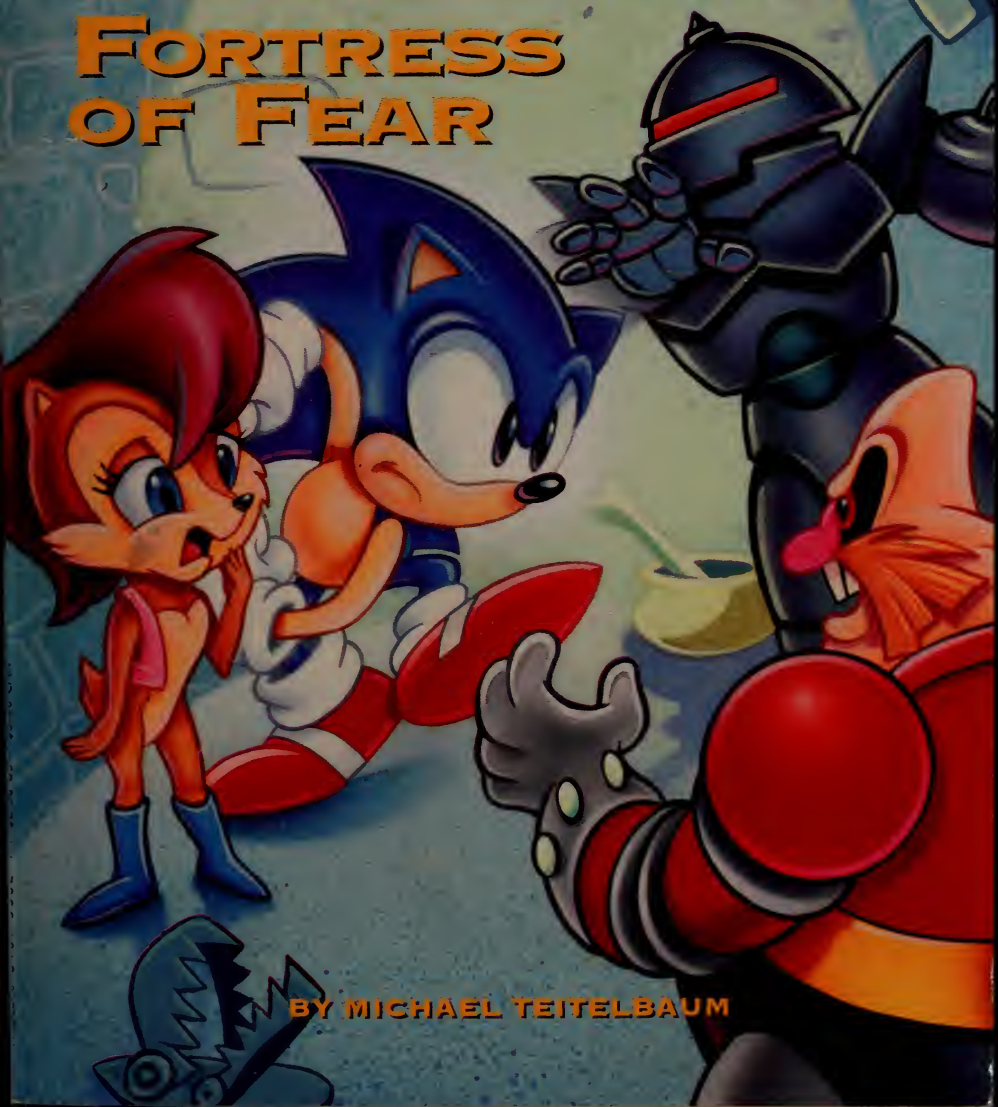
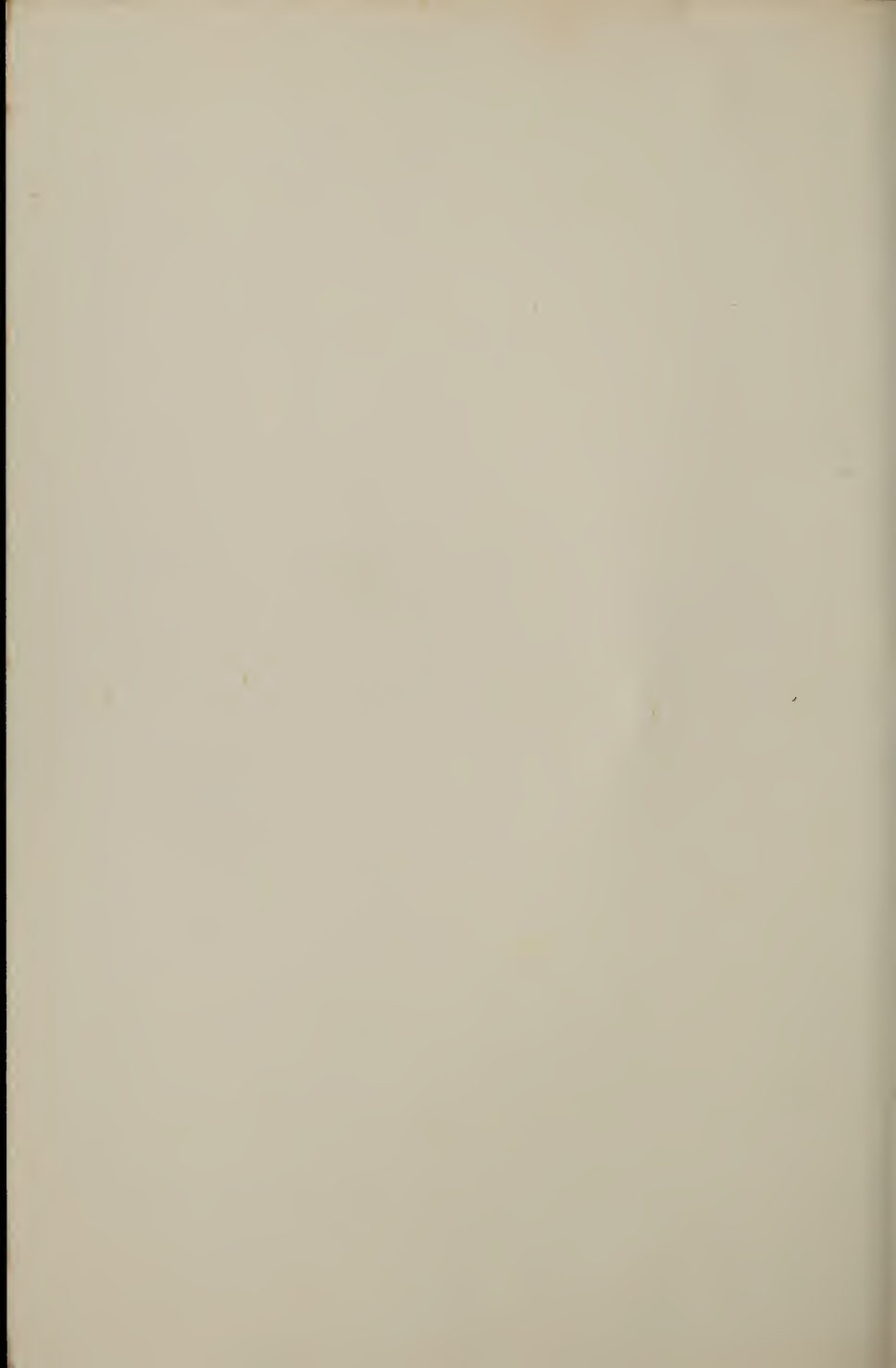


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG™

FORTRESS OF FEAR



BY MICHAEL TEITELBAUM



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SONIC **THE** **HEDGEHOG**™

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Troll Associates

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Chapter

I

The planet Mobius was once a beautiful, clean, and safe place. Its citizens were happy. Its king was wise and fair.

But all that changed when the evil Dr. Robotnik kidnapped the king and made himself the dictator of Mobius. Robotnik turned the good king's magnificent palace into a dark fortress.

Now all is gray on Mobius. Dr. Robotnik's factories pollute the air and the water. Reading, listening to music, and playing are against the law. So is any other activity that might be fun.

And that's not the worst of it. The citizens of Mobius, called Mobians, are being captured. They are taken to Robotnik's fortress in the city he

renamed Robotropolis. In this horrible place, innocent Mobians are forced into Robotnik's Ro-Bo-Machine. They are turned into mindless robotic servants who are made to work for the evil ruler for the rest of their days.

No one on Mobius feels safe anymore. Robotnik's team of robotic soldiers — called Swatbots — patrol the planet, rounding up Mobians to be brought to Robotnik's fortress. These are dark days indeed for the peaceful citizens of this once glorious planet.



In the dank depths of Robotnik's fortress, in a tiny jail cell, sat Rotor, the walrus. Rotor was a member of Princess Sally's brave band of Freedom Fighters. Sally was the daughter of the good King of Mobius. The Freedom Fighters were a group of courageous Mobians trying to get rid of Robotnik, free the king, and restore the planet to its former state of peace and happiness.

Rotor heard a sound and looked up through his cell's narrow bars.

Snively, Robotnik's assistant, led a woodchuck over to the cell door. He unlocked the door, shoved the woodchuck in, and locked the door behind the angry creature.

"Are you all right?" asked Rotor.

"As well as can be expected," replied the woodchuck. "That is, for a Freedom Fighter who is about to be roboticized!"

"Freedom Fighter!" exclaimed Rotor. "I'm a Freedom Fighter too! But I thought my group was the only one!"

"So did I," said the woodchuck, excitedly. "My name is Digger. I live with a group of Freedom Fighters on the western edge of the Great Forest. I was out on patrol when some Swatbots captured me."

"My name is Rotor," the walrus explained. "I belong to a group of Freedom Fighters who also live in the Great Forest. In a place called Knothole Village. We're led by Princess Sally and Sonic The Hedgehog."

"Princess Sally? The daughter of the captured King of Mobius?" asked Digger.

"The very one," replied Rotor.

"Other Freedom Fighters on Mobius..." said Digger, shaking his head in disbelief. His eyes opened wide. "Then the legend of the king's list is true!"

"What list?" asked Rotor. "What are you talking about?"

Rotor looked on in amazement as Digger paced back and forth in their cell and told an incredible tale.

"There is a legend that years ago, the good King of Mobius put together a list of the names and locations of all the Freedom Fighters on Mobius.

"According to this list, there are many groups of Freedom Fighters all over the planet. Until I met you today, Rotor, I thought that my group was the only one. I believed that the list was just a legend. But now I see that it's true."

"This is very good news," said Rotor when Digger had finished. "If all of these Freedom Fighters can be found and organized into one big fighting force, then our chances of defeating Robotnik would be much better."

Rotor's face grew concerned as a terrible thought crossed his mind. "But if this list were to fall into the wrong hands," said Rotor. "It could mean — "

Rotor was interrupted by a sound outside the cell. From down the hallway came Snively, with a Swatbot on each side.

"Well, traitor," Snively began. "Your time has come. Your life of crime will soon be behind you. I, Snively, second in command only to the glorious Dr. Robotnik, will personally lead you to the Ro-Bo-Machine. In a few minutes your freedom will be history. Your only concern will be serving our glorious leader, Dr. Robotnik, in his Reign of Terror."

Snively took Digger from the cell, slamming the door in Rotor's face.

"Don't fret, walrus," Snively said to Rotor. "I haven't forgotten about you. When we are finished roboticizing this woodchuck, I'll be back for you. Then Dr. Robotnik will be free to turn his full attention toward the search."

"The search?" asked Rotor. "The search for what?"

"I suppose there's no harm in telling you. You'll



be a robotic slave in a few minutes anyway,” said Snively. “Once the two of you are disposed of, Dr. Robotnik plans to begin a full-scale search for the former king’s legendary list of Freedom Fighters!”

Rotor’s face turned pale.

“Swatbots!” shouted Snively. “Take the woodchuck away.”

The Swatbots grabbed Digger and began to drag him off.

“Don’t feel lonely, walrus,” said Snively, smirking. “We’ll be back for you shortly.”

Snively followed the others down the hall. As soon as he was out of sight, Rotor slumped to the floor of the cell. Horrible thoughts filled his head.

If Robotnik ever gets his hands on that list, he could locate and roboticize every Freedom Fighter on Mobius. He could take control of the planet forever! There would be no one left to stop him. I’ve got to tell Sally and Sonic about this. We’ve got to find that list before Robotnik does. But first, I’ve got to get out of this cell!

Chapter

2

Outside Robotnik's fortress, a blazing blue streak appeared on the night horizon. It moved at incredible speed toward the fortress' main entrance.

At the edge of the moat that surrounded the fortress, the blue blur came to a sudden stop revealing the fastest being on the planet — SONIC THE HEDGEHOG!

"Last stop, Ro-butt-nik's fortress," said Sonic to Bunnie Rabbot, who was riding on his shoulders. "Please make sure you take all your personal belongings before leaving!" Sonic laughed at his own joke.

"Come on, sugar," said Bunnie, getting down off

his shoulders. "This is no time for jokes. We've got to get Rotor out of that fortress. It's such a horrible place. And I should know. Just being back here gives me the creeps."

Bunnie recalled with horror how Robotnik had captured her and brought her to his fortress. He had put her into his Ro-Bo-Machine. When she was half transformed into a robot, Sonic staged a daring rescue.

Bunnie's body, legs, and left arm had become robotic. Her head and right arm were still those of a living rabbit. Her heart and determination were now twice as big.

"Our first problem is how to get across this moat," said Bunnie, her thoughts returning to the present.

"No biggie," said Sonic. "Hop back on!"

Bunnie climbed onto Sonic's shoulders.

"Now, hold tight," said Sonic. "I'm going to use a Super Sonic Spin to glide across the water and get us over to the other side of the moat."

"But what about those hungry-looking crocs?" asked Bunnie. She pointed to the water in front of them.

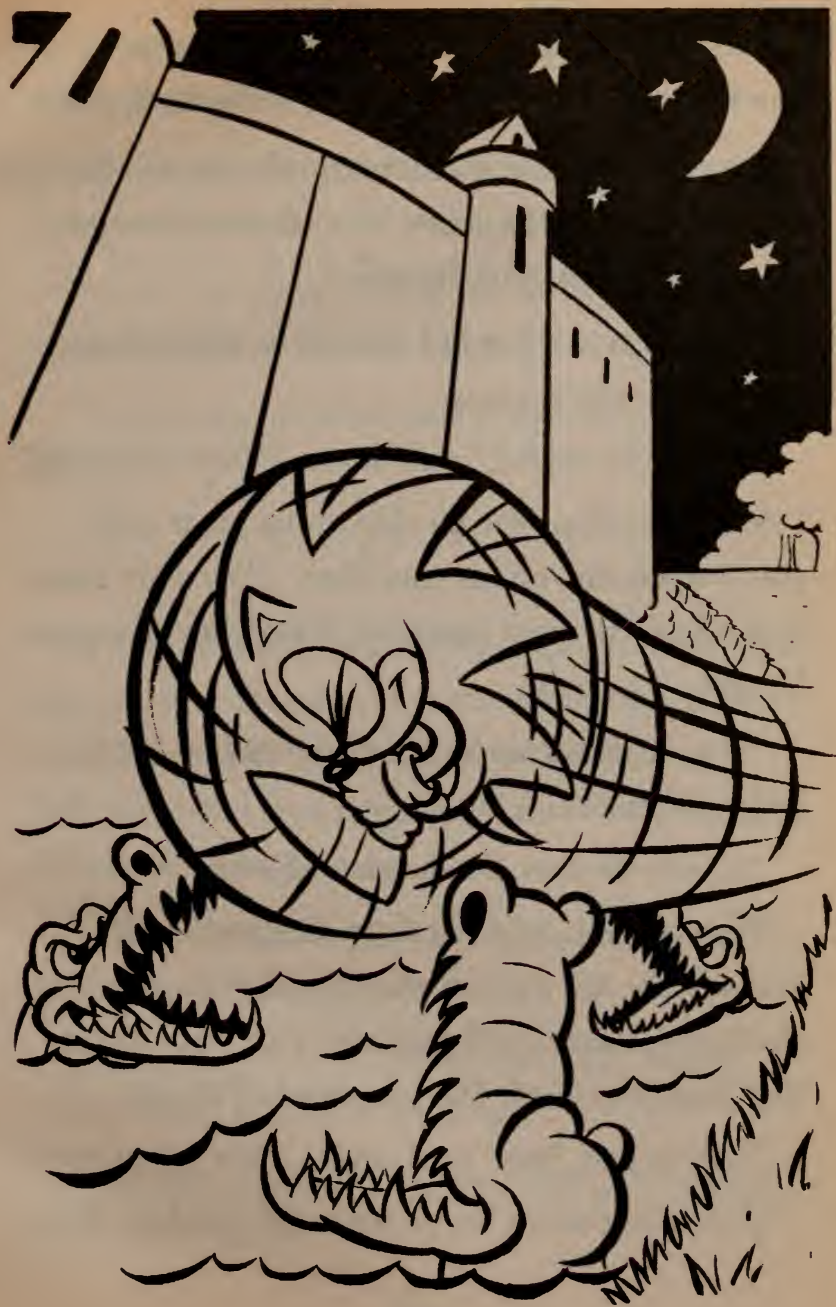
Swimming in the moat that surrounded the fortress were huge crocodiles. Their long sharp teeth glinted in the bright moonlight.

"Hey-y, no prob," said Sonic. "Super Sonic Speed will take care of that. Now, everybody, stand back. I wouldn't want anybody hurt once I start moving!"

Bunnie rolled her eyes to the heavens. "Sonic," she said. "I hate to tell you, but there's nobody here except us."

"I known, Bun," replied Sonic. "It just sounds so cool when I say that!"

Sonic leaped into the moat, with Bunnie on his shoulders. Spinning at top speed, Sonic zoomed across the water's surface. He cut left, then right to outrun the crocs who snapped at his heels. Sonic was spinning so fast it was impossible to see Bunnie.



Suddenly a large croc leaped from the water headed right for them. "Look out!" shouted Sonic.

Bunnie raised her mechanical left arm and bopped the croc right in the snout. The stunned creature went flying back into the water.

"We made it!" shouted Bunnie, as they reached the far side of the moat.

"Of course we did," said Sonic. "You're with me."

Sonic ran along the far side of the moat, still carrying Bunnie on his shoulders. They soon came to the fortress' main entrance. There they were met by three Swatbots.

"Stop-and-surrender!" said a Swatbot. "Stop-and-surrender!"

"In your dreams, Bot-heads!" shouted Sonic.

"Time for me to kick a little Bot-butt!" yelled Bunnie. She did a gymnastic flip off Sonic's shoulders, landing a flying drop kick right to the first Swatbot's head. The bot smashed to bits.

"Way to jam, Bun," said Sonic. "Now it's my turn!"

Sonic went into a Super Sonic Spin. Before they

knew what hit them, the remaining two Swatbots were smashed to pieces.

"You work on the door, Bunnie," said Sonic. "I'll keep an eye out for any more Bot-heads."

Bunnie started pounding on the large steel door to the fortress with her robotic arm and legs.

"I only hope we're in time to save Rotor," said Sonic.

• • • • •

In his cell, Rotor took off his cap. He removed a tiny micro-transmitter, which was hidden in the cap's inner band. The transmitter sent out a homing signal on a frequency known only to his fellow Freedom Fighters.

"I hope some of my buddies are close enough to pick this up!" said Rotor.

Just then, Rotor heard Snively's high, whiny voice yelling from down the hall.

"Swatbots," shouted Snively. "Bring the walrus to the Ro-Bo-Machine!"

Back at the front entrance to the fortress, Bunnie continued to pound on the huge steel door. With one final powerful kick, she managed to rip an opening in the door big enough for Sonic and her to slip through.

“Way to go, Bunnie!” said Sonic.

Bunnie pulled a small receiver from her pocket. The receiver was set to pick up the signal sent by Rotor’s micro-transmitter. She flipped it on. It immediately pointed in the direction of Rotor’s homing signal.

“This way, Sonic,” said Bunnie, pointing down a corridor.

“Hop on, Bun,” said Sonic. “Time to juice in a major way!”

Bunnie climbed onto Sonic’s shoulders, and he took off down the corridor at Super Sonic Speed.

Following the homing signal, Sonic and Bunnie soon arrived at Rotor’s cell. They got there just in

time to see one Swatbot holding the door, while another led Rotor out of the cell.

"It's juice and jam time, Bunnie," shouted Sonic. "Hey Bot-heads. Let go of our friend!"

Sonic took out the Swatbot by the door with a swift Super Sonic Spin. The Swatbot holding Rotor raised his blaster, aiming it at Bunnie. Just as the Swatbot fired, Rotor pushed the blaster up.

The blast hit the ceiling. Rotor dove out of the way as stones poured down onto the Swatbot, crushing it under a huge pile.

"Hi, guys!" said Rotor. "Thanks for the rescue!"

"Hey, no prob, bud," replied Sonic. "Grab on. Time to haul some serious haunch!"

The three Freedom Fighters formed a chain, with Sonic in the lead. Using Sonic's speed, they zoomed out of the fortress and headed back to Knothole Village in the Great Forest.

Chapter

3

Snively stood outside Dr. Robotnik's master control room. He was not looking forward to telling his boss about Rotor's escape.

Snively knocked sheepishly at the control-room door.

"What is it?" boomed Robotnik through the door. "I'm very busy."

"Pardon me, sir," replied Snively. "It is I, Snively. May I come in?"

Robotnik flung open the door and glared at Snively. "This had better be good, Snively," warned Robotnik.

"As a matter of fact, sir, it's rather bad," said

Snively. "One of our prisoners, the walrus named Rotor, has escaped. Rescued by that accursed hedgehog."

Snively braced himself, ready for Robotnik to lose his temper. Much to Snively's surprise, Robotnik laughed softly.

"Ah, Snively, Snively, Snively," Robotnik began. "That's what I love about you. Always missing the big picture. The loss of *one* so-called Freedom Fighter means nothing anymore.

"My full-scale search for the king's list of Freedom Fighters is about to begin. When I find that list — and I *will* find it — I'll destroy *all* of the Freedom Fighters on Mobius!

"Now, Snively. I want you to take charge of all other fortress activities, including security. I have ordered my Swatbots to rip this fortress apart, room by room, piece by piece, until they find that list. And when they do, it will mean the end of Sonic The Hedgehog and all his Freedom Fighter friends!"



Sonic, Bunnie, and Rotor approached the edge of the Great Forest. Following a secret path known only to their little band of Freedom Fighters, they wound their way through the forest until they came to a large tree stump. The stump was actually the secret entrance to Knothole Village — the home of Princess Sally and Sonic's Freedom Fighters.

Bunnie lifted the top of the stump, and the three friends jumped into the opening. They slid down a twisting, turning slide and landed in a soft pile of hay.

"We're home, gang!" shouted Sonic. "And we brought back someone special!"

"Rotor!" shouted Princess Sally, giving the walrus a big hug. "It's good to see you back! Nice job, Sonic and Bunnie. That was a close one."

"Hi, Sonic. Are you okay?" asked Tails, the young two-tailed fox. Sonic was Tails' hero. Tails worried about the hedgehog whenever he went out on a dangerous mission.

"I'm fine, little guy," said Sonic. "Juicin' as usual."

"Juicin', wow!" repeated Tails.

"Welcome back, Rotor," said Antoine, Princess Sally's former palace guard and loyal servant. "I trust your stay in Robotnik's fortress wasn't too unpleasant."

"Unpleasant enough, Antoine," replied Rotor. "But that's not important now. I've got some big news!"

Rotor told the others what he had learned about the list and about the existence of other Freedom Fighters on Mobius.

The Knothole Gang was amazed.

"Other Freedom Fighters!" cried Sonic. "That's the best news I've heard in years. The more the merrier, I say!"

"That's fantastic," said Bunnie. "It's nice to know we're not the only ones on Mobius fighting Robotnik."

"Wow!" exclaimed Tails. "More Freedom Fighters. I wonder where they live? I wonder if

there are any other two-tailed foxes!”

“Hang on, little pal. I haven’t told you the bad news,” said Rotor. “Robotnik also knows about the list, and he’s starting a major search of the entire fortress to find it!”

Sally’s face grew serious. “We’ve got to find that list first,” she said. “If Robotnik finds the list, it will mean the end of all Freedom Fighters on Mobius!”

“Where did the list come from?” asked Tails.

“When I was a little girl living in the palace,” Sally began, “my father, the good king, compiled a list of all the brave and true warriors in his kingdom. These must be the Mobians who eventually became the Freedom Fighters now located all around Mobius.”

“Where is the list now?” asked Tails.

“That’s just it,” replied Sally. “Nobody knows. I *do* know that my father hid the list somewhere in his palace before he was captured by Robotnik. Of course the palace is now Robotnik’s fortress. Which means that the list is somewhere in the fortress.”

"Where do we even begin to look for the list?" asked Antoine.

"In my father's papers," the princess replied.

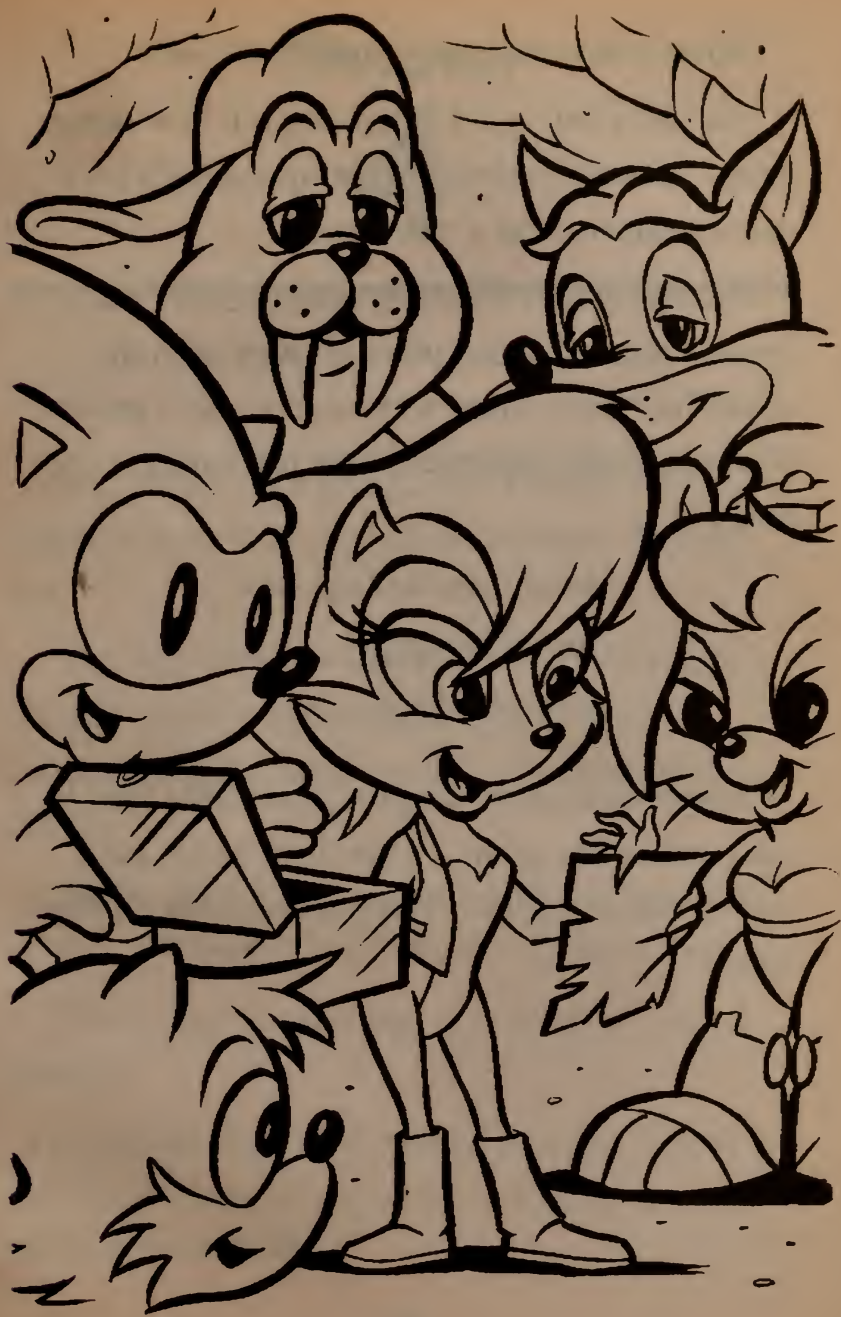
Sally went to a locked steel box where she kept a bundle of her father's important papers. "I found these papers during a mission to the fortress, shortly after my father was captured," she explained.

Sally looked through all the papers in the box, but found nothing that mentioned the list. "I've looked at these papers a hundred times," she said. "If there was anything about the list, I'd have noticed it before."

"What's that?" asked Rotor, looking into the empty steel box for the first time. He pointed to a small circle on the bottom of the box.

"I guess it's just a design," replied Sally.

"May I see it?" asked Rotor. He took the strongbox, pressed down on the circle, and twisted. Suddenly a panel in the bottom of the box slid open.



"Rotor, you're a genius!" exclaimed Sally.

"I'm just pretty good at figuring out how things work," he said modestly. "I can spot a latch for a secret compartment a mile away."

Sure enough, in the secret compartment, Sally found a tattered, faded piece of paper with the word "list" on it. There were several other groups of words on the paper that were just barely readable:

...beside your bed safe and...

...tucked in tight...

...you cannot fall...

"These words seem familiar," said Sally. "But I can't quite place them. I'll bet these words are a clue to where the list is hidden. But, what do they mean?"

Chapter

4

The next morning, the Freedom Fighters were hard at work on a plan to find the list.

"The only thing we know for sure," said Sally, "is that the list is somewhere in Robotnik's fortress. And Robotnik wants to find it as badly as we do."

"So, it's settled," said Sonic, ready to zoom into action. "It's back to the fortress. Let's juice."

"Won't they be *expecting* us to do that?" asked Bunnie.

"Of course they will," replied Antoine. "Sonic is just being his usual impatient self, ready to rush off without thinking."

"All you ever want to do is sit around and talk!" Sonic shouted at Antoine. "I say action speaks louder than words. So let's cruise!"

"And put the princess in danger, once again?" snapped back Antoine.

"Will you two please stop arguing?" asked Sally. "Bunnie is right. They *will* be expecting us. I think we should leave after dark and travel under cover of night."

That evening, just after nightfall, Sonic, Sally, Bunnie, Antoine, and Rotor prepared for their big mission.

"Be careful, Sonic," said Tails as they left. "And good luck."

"Don't worry about us, little guy," said Sonic, patting Tails gently on the head. "I'm too quick to get in trouble."

The five Freedom Fighters slipped out of Knothole Village. Bunnie led the way.

"Your superior night vision is going to come in handy on this mission, Bunnie," said Sally, who followed right behind her.

Antoine, who was never far from the princess, was next in line, followed by Sonic. Rotor, the slowest of the group, took up the rear.

When they finally reached the fortress, they spotted three Swatbots guarding the main entrance. From the far side of the moat, the Freedom Fighters could see that the large steel door Bunnie had kicked in had been replaced by an even thicker concrete door.

“Wow!” said Bunnie. “They’ve beefed up that door. We won’t be able to muscle our way in this time. I sure hope Rotor’s new invention works!”

Sally pulled out Nicole, her hand-held computer, from her backpack. Rotor took a complicated-looking piece of electronic equipment from his. “Here you go, Rotor,” said Sally, handing the computer to him.

“Now don’t worry, Nicole,” said Rotor, hooking up his device into one of Nicole’s input ports. “This won’t hurt a bit.” Because Nicole was programmed to speak, the Freedom Fighters felt like she was almost one of their family.

"That's very kind of you, Rotor," said Nicole. "But as you know, I really can't feel pain!"

"What's that thing-a-ma-jiggy do anyway?" asked Sonic.

"It's a high-powered frequency generator. It's set at the same frequency as the Swatbots' brains," explained Rotor. "I'm hoping that by running the signal through Nicole, we can scramble up the Swatbots' brains and program them with new instructions."

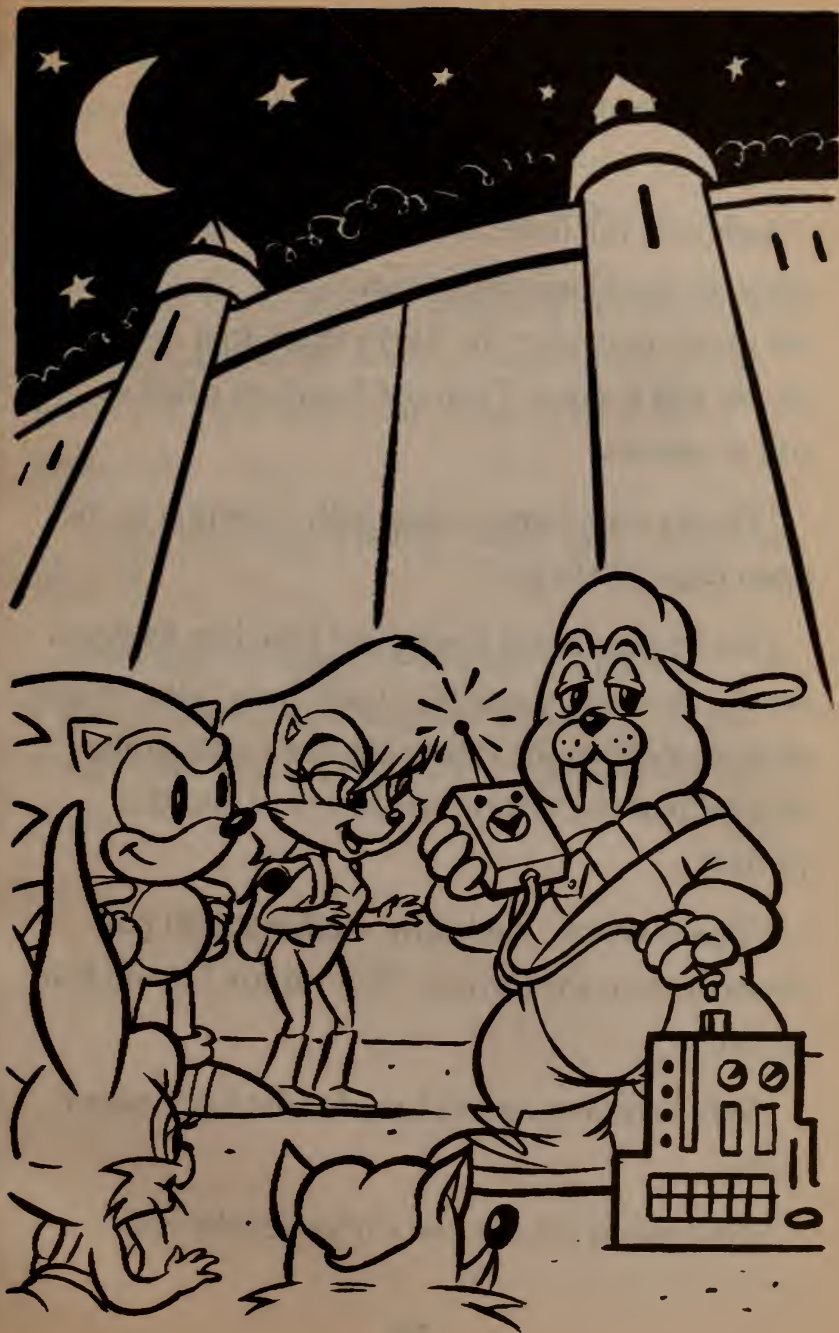
"Way past cool, Rotor," said Sonic. "Let her rip!"

Rotor switched on the device. Lights on Nicole began to flash wildly. "Okay, Princess," said Rotor. "It's all yours. Any command you type in should go directly to the Swatbots' brains."

Sally took the computer from Rotor. She typed:
OPEN THE FRONT ENTRANCE, THEN STAND PERFECTLY
STILL, on Nicole's keyboard.

"Nothing's happening," said Sonic, tapping his foot impatiently.

"Relax, Sonic," said Rotor. "It takes a few minutes to work."



The Freedom Fighters spent the next several minutes anxiously waiting for something to happen.

Suddenly the three Swatbots guarding the front entrance stood up stiffly at attention. The leader of the group moved to the heavy front door and slowly slid it open. Then the Swatbots stood as still as statues.

"There's our chance," said Sally, pointing to the open door. "Let's go!"

One by one, Sonic ferried the Freedom Fighters across the moat, using his Super Sonic Spin. When they were all on the other side, the entire group slipped past the frozen Swatbots and into the fortress.

"This is weird," said Sally, walking right past Swatbots into the fortress. "But I think I could learn to like it!"

"Where do we start to look for the list?" asked Sonic.

Sally pulled out the piece of paper she had

found in her father's box. She read the first group of words on the paper:

...beside your bed safe and...

Antoine spoke up. "If I remember correctly, Your Highness, when this was the royal palace, there was a safe right near your father's bed in his bedroom."

"Good thinking, Antoine," said Sally. "Let's start there."

With Sally leading the way, the Freedom Fighters dashed off toward what used to be the king's bedroom, hoping they would find the list there.

Chapter

5

“Report!” boomed Robotnik. His deep voice echoed out of the master control room.

The Swatbot that stood before him stiffened, then spoke. “We-have-searched-all-bedrooms-kitchens-ballrooms-on-main-level. List-not-found. Now-proceeding-to-upper-and-lower-levels-of-fortress.”

“Have you searched *thoroughly*?” yelled Robotnik.

“As-per-your-orders-we-have-searched-every-crook-and-nanny.”

“That’s *nook and cranny*, you idiot!” shouted Robotnik. “Well, don’t just stand there. Proceed with your search. Tear the place to pieces if you have to, but *FIND THAT LIST!*”

• • • • •

While Robotnik was busy with his search for the list, Snively was taking his duties as head of fortress security very seriously. Robotnik had assigned him a squad of special security Swatbots to help him guard the fortress.

Snively looked at the monitors in front of him, showing various locations throughout the fortress. Suddenly a red light began blinking above the monitor showing the main hallway. On the monitor, Snively saw the Freedom Fighters moving quickly through the fortress.

“Well, well, well,” said Snively. “Sonic and his friends have entered the fortress. It looks like Dr. Robotnik is not the only one looking for that list. Here’s my chance to impress my glorious leader. I’ll show him that *I* should be in charge of palace security all the time. I’ll capture those traitors myself!”

• • • • •

Sonic, Sally, Rotor, Bunnie, and Antoine moved through the fortress quickly. All around them they saw the destruction caused by Robotnik's frantic search. Every piece of furniture was ripped apart, and suits of armor were piled in pieces. Paintings were torn and statues were smashed to bits. Big holes were opened in the ceiling and walls.

"Wow!" said Sonic. "Looks like Butt-nik's been cruisin' and bruisin' around here."

"Robotnik has left no stone unturned," said Sally, sad at the destruction of her former home.

"It appears, Your Highness, that Robotnik has looked everywhere," said Antoine. "It seems he has no plan, no clue as to where the list might be. So he is simply tearing apart every room in the fortress."

"Well, he's got those Swatbots to help him," said Bunnie. "All we've got is us!"

"I hope he hasn't made it to my father's old bedroom," sighed Sally. "Come on, let's hurry."

After racing through the fortress, the Freedom

Fighters finally arrived at the room that had been the good king's bedroom.

"This is it, Antoine," said Sally, staring at the large wooden door.

"Yes, Your Highness," said Antoine, sighing deeply. "I have many fond memories of you and your father in this fortress, back when it was his palace. Before the dark times of Robotnik."

Sally's face grew sad. "I miss my father so much," she cried. "Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever see him again."

Sonic put a comforting arm around his good friend. "You'll see him again, Sal," said Sonic softly. "I promise. But the only way we can free the king is to stop Robotnik and take Mobius back. If we find that list, we have a much better chance of getting rid of old Butt-nik once and for all!"

"Thanks, Sonic," said Sally, kissing him softly on the head. "You're a good friend."

Sonic blushed. "Enough with the mushy stuff, Sal," he said. "Let's move!"

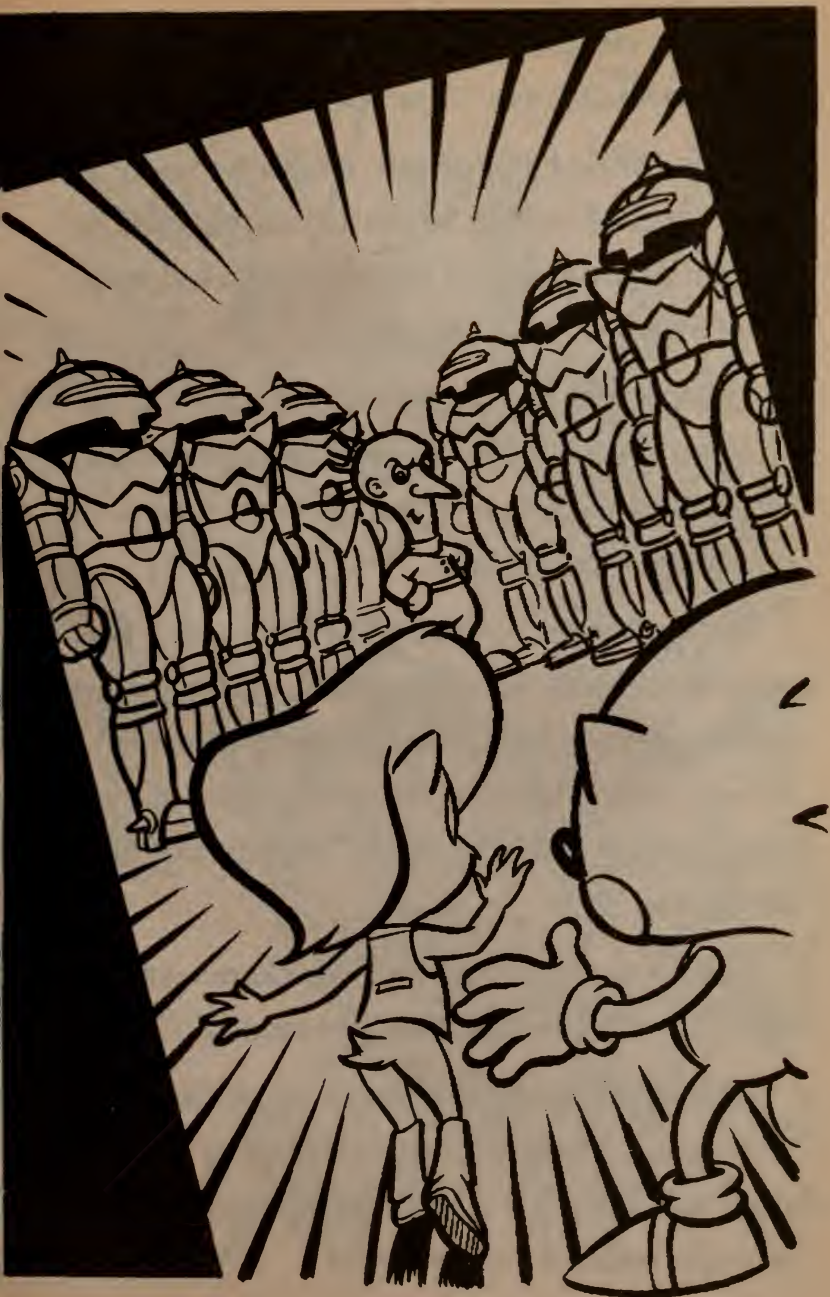
Sally opened the door and the Freedom Fighters stepped into the bedroom. Waiting inside was Snively and his team of security Swatbots.

“Looking for something?” asked Snively with an evil smile. “You are too late. Dr. Robotnik’s Swatbots have already looked in this room and found nothing. However, it appears that *I* have found *you*! Which means that *you* will now be locked in the dungeon as prisoners.”

Snively snapped his fingers and the Swatbots moved toward the Freedom Fighters.

“Rotor, use the frequency generator!” shouted Sally.

Rotor typed the words: SWATBOTS STAND STILL into Nicole’s keyboard, but before the command had a chance to take effect, a Swatbot knocked the device from Rotor’s hands. The generator bounced on the ground and stopped working, although Nicole was unharmed. Sally put Nicole safely into her backpack, then turned to Sonic.



"Looks like it's time to juice 'em and reduce 'em!" shouted Sonic. "You Bot-heads are history!"

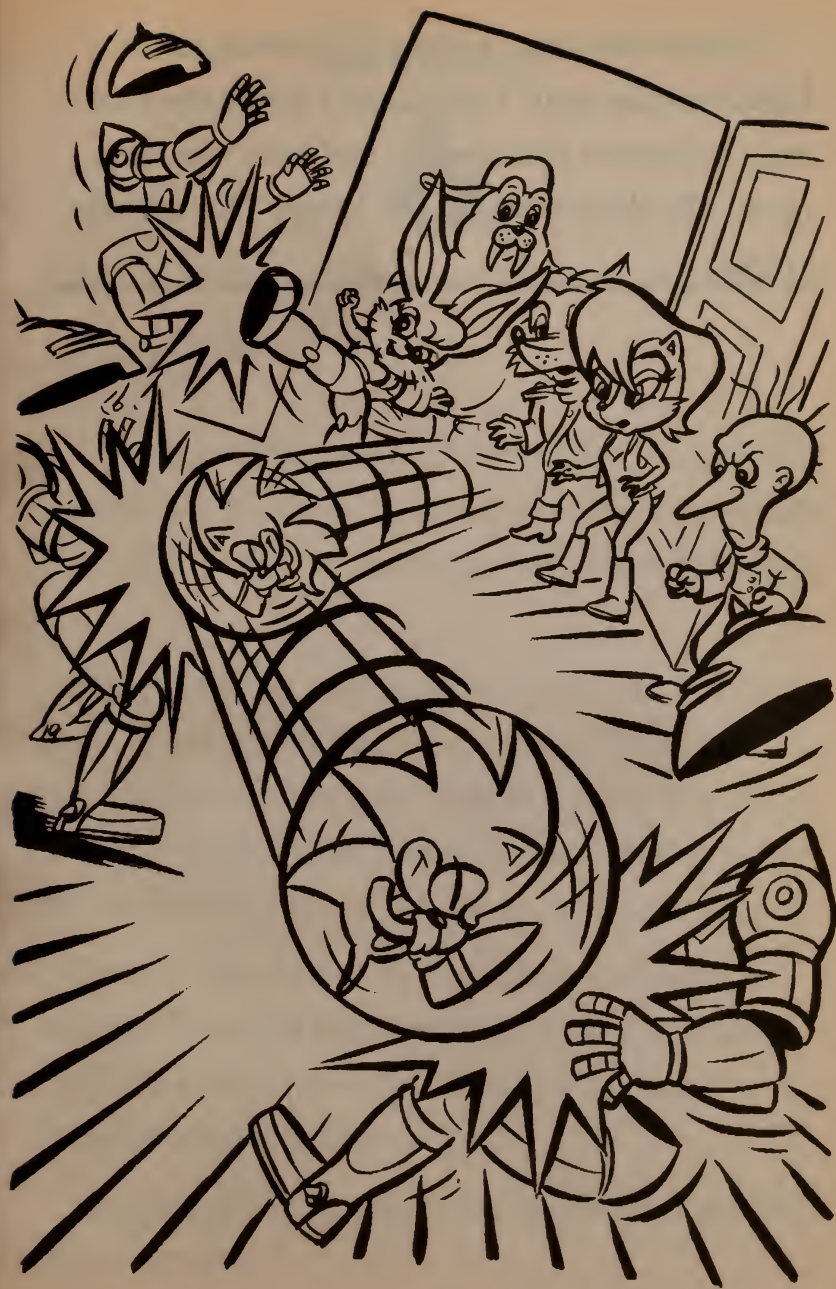
Sonic whirled into action. His Super Sonic Spin took out the first two Swatbots. Bunnie used her robotic arm and legs to punch and kick several more Swatbots to the ground.

As Sonic and Bunnie battled the Swatbots, an evil grin spread across Snively's face. *This would be the perfect time for me to grab the princess and take her prisoner*, he thought.

Snively stepped toward Sally. He reached his arms out to grab her. But faithful Antoine was not about to let any harm come to the princess. As Snively rushed forward, Antoine stuck out his leg. Snively tripped and fell flat on his face just before he reached Sally.

"Have a nice trip, Snively?" snickered Antoine, very proud of himself. "See you next fall!"

Sonic and Bunnie were finishing off the last of Snively's Swatbots. Facing the Freedom Fighters alone was not what Snively had in mind, so he ran from the bedroom at top speed.



“There’s the safe!” said Sally pointing to the bedroom’s far wall. They dashed across the room only to discover that the safe had been smashed open. The door hung by one hinge. The safe was empty!

Chapter

6

“I can’t believe it,” said Sally. “Snively was telling the truth. Robotnik has already searched this room. If the list was in the safe, then Robotnik has it.”

While Sally wondered what to do next, Rotor went to work repairing his frequency generator. “It’s not broken as badly as I thought,” he said, pulling his trusty bag of tools from his pack. Within a few minutes he had the generator up and running.

Outside the door to the bedroom, the metallic sound of Swatbot feet clanging on the stone floor could be heard echoing down the hall. The Freedom Fighters froze in fear.

“Do you think Snively sent them back to get us?” asked Antoine.

"Let's find out," said Rotor. He reattached the generator to Nicole, then typed in the command: SWATBOTS, REPORT.

A few minutes later, through the bedroom door, came the mechanical voice of a Swatbot.

"Dr.-Robotnik-is-very-unhappy-that-the-list-has-still-not-been-found. He-wants-this-castle-turned-upside-down. We-must-search-every-crook-and-nanny-until-the-list-is-located-and-brought-to-him."

"That's *nook and cranny*, you dumb Swatbot," Sally muttered softly to her friends. Everyone smiled.

"So the list *wasn't* in the safe," continued Sally, breathing a sigh of relief. "There still may be time for *us* to find it first."

Sally looked again at the piece of paper she had found in her father's box. "There's got to be a clue in here somewhere!" She read the next group of words:

... tucked in tight ... you cannot fall ...

“‘Tucked in tight’ sounds like a bed,” said Bunnie.

“A bed from which you cannot fall?” asked Antoine.

“A crib!” shouted Sally. “Maybe he meant my old crib!”

“That would be in the old nursery where you slept as a child, Your Highness,” said Antoine.

“What are we waiting for?” asked Sonic. “Let’s haul some serious haunch!”

The Freedom Fighters slipped from the bedroom. Led by Antoine, who knew the layout of the former palace better than anyone, they made their way to the old nursery.

Once inside, Sally found her old crib. “Look!” she shouted with glee. “Robotnik hasn’t made it to this room yet. Nothing’s been touched, including my crib.”

Rotor went to work, carefully taking apart the crib. He searched every piece, but found nothing. “What about the mattress, Sally?” asked Rotor. “It could be in there, but I’d have to cut it open to find out.”

Sally sighed deeply. The old crib meant a lot to her. It was a symbol of her happy childhood at the palace. It made her think of her father, and how much she loved and missed him. She hated having to destroy the mattress, but if this meant finding the list, it was worth it. *That list could be the key to finding and freeing my father*, she thought.

“Go ahead, Rotor,” said Sally. “Cut it open.”

Rotor took a sharp blade from his tool pouch and sliced the thin mattress. He opened it in half, like a book, then started sifting through the stuffing. When he was finished, he had found nothing.

“It’s not here, Sally,” said Rotor. “I’m sorry.” Sally fell back into a chair, her head hung low. “I was sure that’s what those words meant,” she said sadly. “Now where do we look?”

Suddenly, the Freedom Fighters heard the sound of a huge bolt locking outside the nursery door. A small slot in the door slid open, revealing Snively’s beady eyes.

“Fortunately, Princess, you won’t have to worry about where to look next,” said Snively. “Because now I’ve got you all trapped!”



Chapter

7

Outside the nursery, Snively laughed. He had just slammed the bolt that locked the Freedom Fighters inside the room. He left a Swatbot at the door to stand guard.

“Stay here and guard this door,” Snively ordered. “I’m going to tell Dr. Robotnik of my triumph. He may still be searching for that list, but I’ve managed to accomplish what he has been unable to do. I’ve captured Sonic, Princess Sally, and their band of traitors!”

With that, Snively scurried off to find Robotnik.

Inside the nursery, Sonic paced back and forth. “Do you think you can use your machine to help get us out of here, Rotor?” he asked.

Rotor switched on his frequency generator and typed in the command: UNBOLT AND OPEN THE DOOR. They waited a few moments, but nothing happened. Rotor checked the generator.

"It looks like Snively has changed the frequency of the Swatbots' brainwaves," explained Rotor. "It could take me hours, even days, to find the new frequency."

"We don't have days," said Sally.

All of the Freedoms Fighters slumped dejectedly onto the floor.

"I hate to say it," said Bunnie. "But it looks like Robotnik has won. Trapped in this room, we can't search for the list."

"And even if we get out," added Rotor, "where would we look next?"

"No!" said Sally, mustering all her will. "It can't end like this. I can't let it!"

"Take it easy, Sal," said Sonic coming over to comfort her. He had never seen his good friend this upset. "We'll get out of this, or my name's not Sonic!"

Seeing how upset Sally was, Rotor came over to give her a hug. As he walked across the room, he accidentally knocked an old music box off a small table.

The music box fell over, and its lid opened. It began to play a sweet tune. The lovely melody filled the room. Sally's eyes lit up. "Wait a minute," she said. "I know that tune. It's an old lullaby my father used to sing for me!"

She listened carefully as the music box played the melody one more time. It triggered something deep in her memory.

"That's it!" she cried. "That's what the words mean. They are part of the lyrics to this lullaby!"

"But why would your father write the words to the lullaby on the same piece of paper containing information about the list?" asked Bunnie.

"The clue to the list's location must be contained in the full lyrics to the lullaby!" replied Sally.

"Do you remember the words, Your Highness?" asked Antoine.

"Hearing that tune brings them back to me,"
said Sally.

She thought for a moment, then began to sing:

*"Sleep, little princess
rest your head,
Papa's right here beside your bed.
Safe and warm,
all tucked in tight,
dream sweet dreams all through the night.
But if to sleep you cannot fall,
listen to the ticky-tock on the wall.
Ticky-tock, ticky-tock, ding, ding, ding,
The bells of sleep begin to ring.
Ticky-tock, ticky-tock, ding, ding, dong,
sweet little princess, sleep till dawn."*

"The clock, Your Highness!" said Antoine
excitedly. "I remember it. It used to hang on the
wall right across from your crib."

"The list must be hidden in the clock!"
exclaimed Sally.

They immediately searched the nursery, top to
bottom, but found no sign of the clock.

"I'll bet my father put it in the tower for safekeeping before the palace fell to Robotnik," said Sally.

"Well, now we know where the list is," said Bunnie. "But we've still got to get out of this room."

"Wait a minute," said Sally. "This old place is filled with secret staircases that lead from room to room. If I remember right, there's a secret staircase that leads from this room up to the tower! But where is it?"

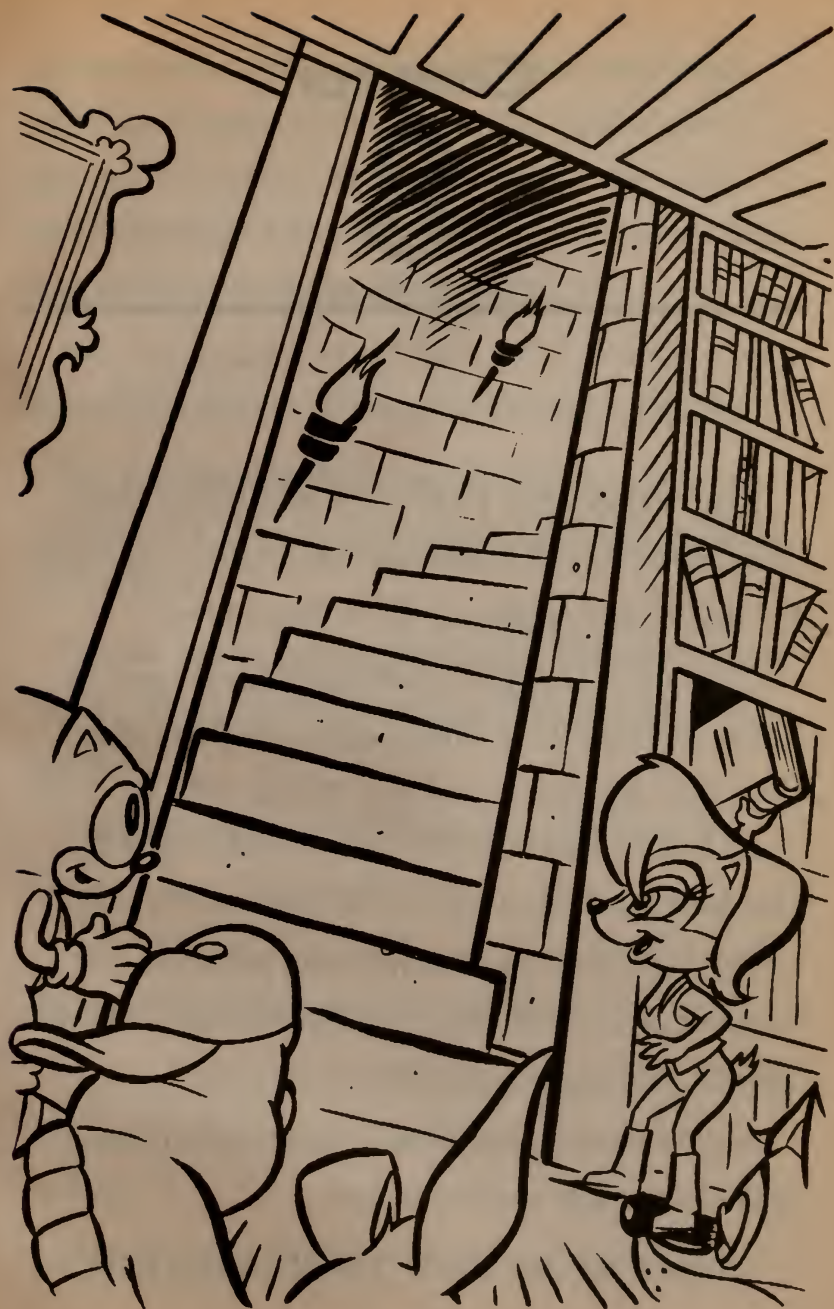
Sally walked along a wall pressing on the stones as she went. "Some of the secret doors can be opened by pressing stones in the wall. Others are triggered by . . . *BOOKS!*" she shouted.

Sally had come to a large bookcase on the wall.

"I remember now," she cried. She went from shelf to shelf pulling books forward. "If you pull the right book out just a bit —"

Suddenly, the wall next to the bookcase slid open, revealing a stairway leading up.

"Bingo!" Sally shouted. "Let's get out of here!"



Chapter

8

The Freedom Fighters ran into the secret doorway and climbed the circular stairs that led higher and higher to the fortress' tower.

They arrived at the tower and pushed open its heavy wooden door. Once inside, they saw that the tower had been used as a storage area for many years by the king. Old furniture, suits of armor, and family heirlooms filled the dark musty room.

The room was also littered with pieces of Swatbot armor. "Obviously Robotnik also uses this room for storage," said Sally.

In a far corner of the tower sat an old chiming wall clock. Sally spotted it first.

"There it is!" she cried. "The clock that hung in

my bedroom.” She dashed across the room and knelt down next to the clock. Her excitement changed to horror when she saw that the clock had been ripped open. Its springs and chimes lay scattered on the damp stone floor.

“We’re too late!” cried Sally. “The clock is empty. Robotnik’s already been here and taken the list!”

Her friends gathered around Sally to try to comfort her. She stood up with a determined look on her face.

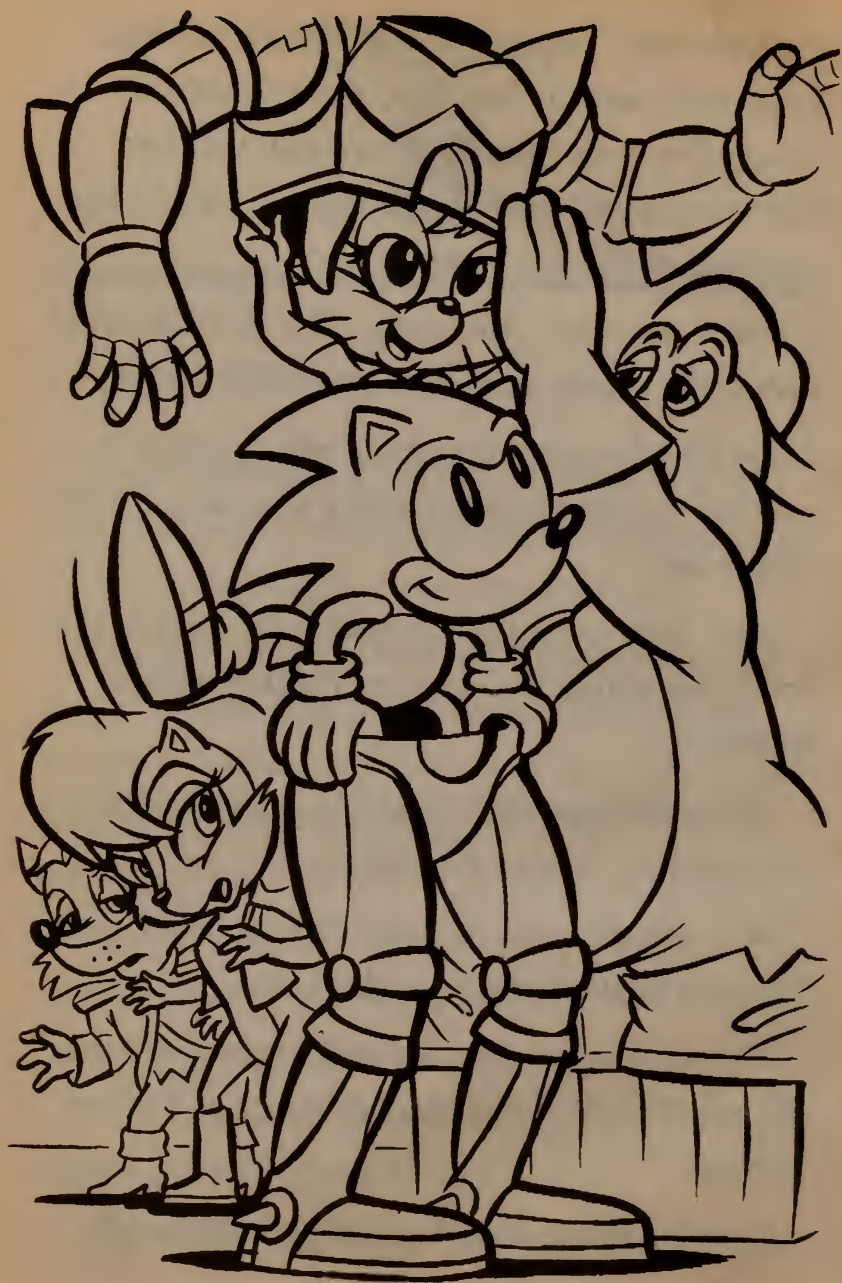
“We’ve got to get that list back,” she announced, “or it’s the end of the Freedom Fighters all over Mobius!”

“We’re with you, Sal,” said Sonic, itching for some action. “What’s the plan?”

Sally thought for a moment, then pointed to the pieces of Swatbot armor on the floor.

“Sonic,” began Sally. “You’re going to slip inside the bottom half of this Swatbot armor and move its legs.”

“Moving legs is what I’m best at,” said Sonic.



"Bunnie," continued Sally. "You're going to get into the top and use your strength to move its arms. We'll put you together, and no one will know you're not a real Swatbot!"

"Great, Sally," said Bunnie, sounding a bit puzzled. "But what then?"

"Then," replied Sally, "this 'Swatbot' is going to lead the rest of us to Robotnik."

"This sounds too dangerous, Your Highness," said Antoine.

"It may be," said Sally. "But it's our only hope of getting the list back. Robotnik will think that this 'Swatbot' has captured us. When he least expects it, Sonic and Bunnie will burst from the Swatbot armor and get the list!"

Sonic and Bunnie climbed into the Swatbot armor. Rotor helped put the two halves together with the two Freedom Fighters inside.

"You-will-come-with-me," said Sonic from inside, imitating a Swatbot's cold, metallic voice.

"Very funny, Sonic," said Sally. "Okay, gang. Let's be on our way."

Antoine was still shaking his head when the 'Swatbot' led the others down the hall toward Robotnik's master control room.

• • • • •

In his master control room, in the center of the fortress, Robotnik clutched a tattered, yellowing piece of paper.

"At last!" he said to himself. "The list I have long searched for. I finally have what I need to put an end to these traitorous Freedom Fighters, and complete my domination of Mobius forever!"

At that moment a knock came on the control-room door.

"Who dares disturb the great Robotnik in his moment of glory?" he shouted.

"Swatbot-reporting-with-prisoners-sir," came the metallic-sounding answer.

Robotnik pushed a button on his console, and the door to the control room slid open. In strode a Swatbot leading Sally, Antoine, and Rotor.

"Well, well," cackled Robotnik. "If it isn't the prisoners Snively told me about. This is a glorious day indeed. I found the list that will mean the end of all the so-called Freedom Fighters on Mobius. And the Princess Sally herself is my prisoner. This will be a day I long remember!"

"You-bet-it-will-Butt-nik," said the Swatbot.
"But-not-for-the-reasons-you-think."

"What!" shouted Robotnik in a rage. "You dare speak to me like that!"

Sonic and Bunnie burst from the Swatbot armor.
"I dare, I dare!" cried Sonic.

Bunnie jumped on top of Robotnik, catching him by surprise and knocking him to the ground.

The list went flying out of Robotnik's hand.

Sonic zoomed across the room and snatched the list out of the air, before it hit the ground.

"Can't say this hasn't been fun," said Sonic. "But it's time for us to juice!"

As Robotnik tried to get up, Sonic circled him with a Super Sonic Spin. Robotnik spun to the ground, then passed out from dizziness.



The Freedom Fighters ran out of the control room just as Snively was arriving to tell Robotnik that the prisoners had escaped. Sonic plowed right over Snively, flattening him on the ground.

“What is the meaning of this!” shouted Snively.
“I —”

Just as Snively got to his feet, Bunnie crashed into him, followed by Sally, Antoine, and finally Rotor.

• • • • •

“This is all your fault, Snively,” shouted Robotnik when he regained consciousness.

“My fault?” said Snively. “If I must say so, sir, I strongly disagree.”

“Well don’t just stand there, you fool,” shouted Robotnik. “Call out the Swatbots. Stop them!”

“Actually, sir, I don’t think I can communicate with the Swatbot brains anymore, I think they’ve lost respect for me,” said Snively.

“Why you spineless, lazy fool!” shouted Robotnik, “I am in charge here, and I *order* you to call out the Swatbots!”

"You may be in charge, but don't forget, it was *I* who captured the Freedom Fighters in the first, second, and almost third place!" said Snively.

By the time Robotnik and Snively finished arguing, the Freedom Fighters were long gone. They had fled from the fortress with what they had come for — the king's precious list!

• • • • •

Back in Knothole Village, the brave band of adventurers were greeted by the rest of their small family.

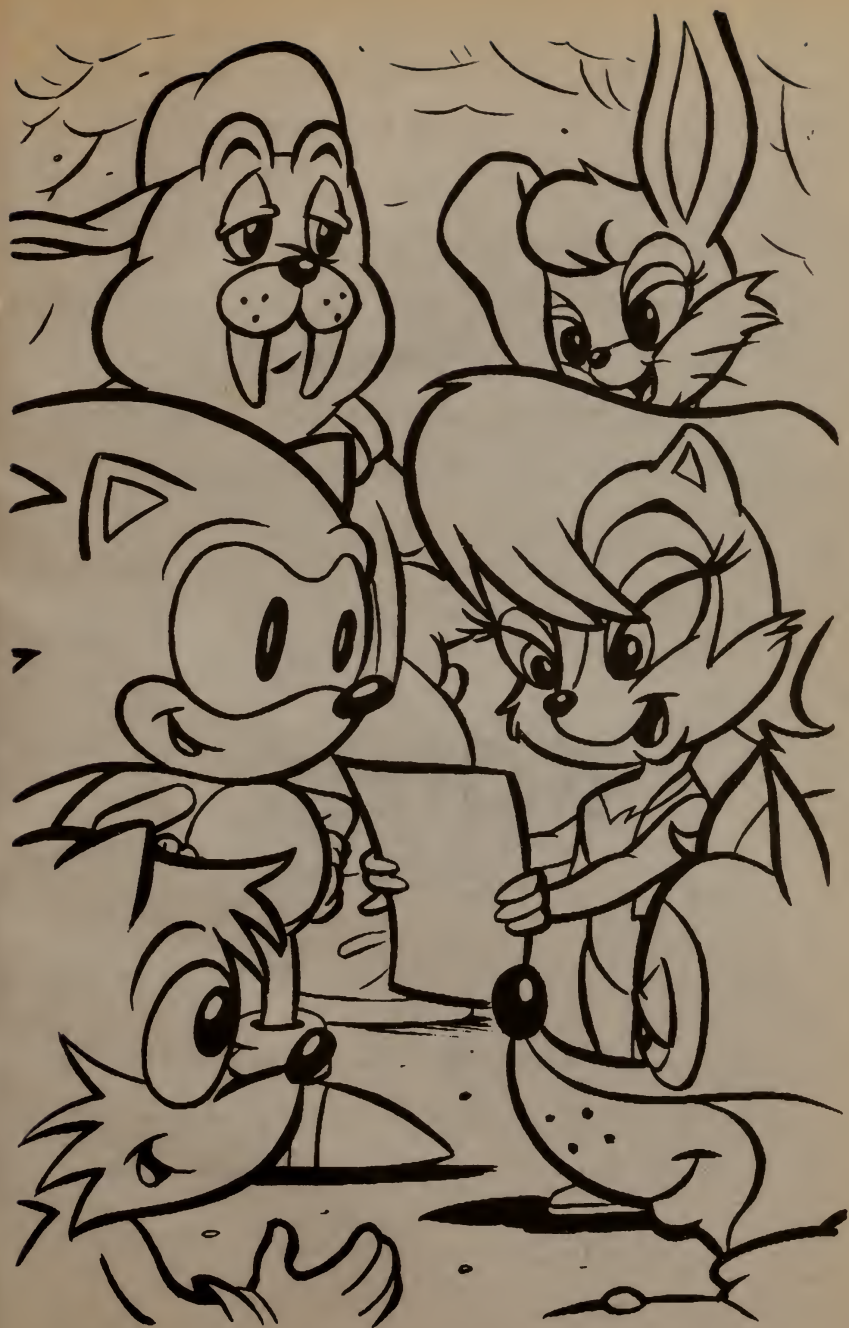
"I'm really glad to see you back, Sonic," said Tails. "Did you find that list?"

"You bet, little buddy," replied Sonic.

"Oh, boy," said Tails. "Now we can find the other Freedom Fighters!"

Sally looked over the list and smiled for the first time in days.

"Now that we have this list of all the other Freedom Fighters on Mobius," she began, "our



chances of finding my father and restoring Mobius to its peaceful state are greater than ever.”

Sally gave Sonic a big hug. “Thank you, Sonic,” she said. “For all your help.”

“No prob, Sal,” said Sonic. “Mobius is practically a better place to live in already. And with the help of the other Freedom Fighters, we’ll get rid of that Robuttnik in a second — a Sonic-Second!”



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